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SUBJECT: Update on 2009 G8 Environment Ministerial and Related
Meetings; Possible U.S. Congress-Italy Cooperation on Small Island
States' Adaptation to Climate Change

Refs: A) 12/10/08 Preston-Tessler e-mail B) Rome 1465 (notal) C)
State 126552 (notal) D) State 125841 (notal) E) Rome 1415 F) Rome
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¶1. (U) Summary. Italian environment and foreign affairs officials described to visiting StaffDel Williams current plans for G8 and related environmental meetings, leading up to the G8 Environment Ministerial now scheduled for April 22-24, 2009. The StaffDel expressed strong interest in Italy's cooperation with the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS) on adaptation to climate change, and proposed that the Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment participate in a January meeting of the cooperation partners, to be held in New York. Italian officials welcomed U.S. participation in the project. See paras 3-5 for comments on timing and substance of the G8 Environment Ministerial, and paras 4-6 for discussion of the AOSIS cooperation project. End summary.

¶2. (U) Lisa Williams, Staff Director for the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, and subcommittee staff colleagues Vili Lei and David Richmond, visited Rome December 3-12 to discuss climate change cooperation between the U.S. and Italy, and to discuss with the Holy See the consequences of climate change on vulnerable societies (refs C and D). They met with Italian, Holy See, and Vatican City-State environment and foreign affairs officials and experts (ref B).

Update on G8 and related environmental meetings

¶3. (SBU) During their meetings with the StaffDel, Government of Italy (GOI) officials provided the following update on plans for G8 and related environmental meetings, leading up to the G8 Environment Ministerial now scheduled to be held April 22-24, 2009 in Siracusa, Sicily (ref F).

-- The Environment Ministry is tentatively planning to hold a preparatory meeting for the Environment Ministerial in Rome on March 9, 2009. It is possible that a meeting of Major Economies (ME) negotiators on Energy Security and Climate Change could be held before or after the preparatory meeting, if the U.S. and key ME partners would find that useful (see also refs E and F).

-- If necessary, a second Ministerial preparatory meeting could be

held in early April, but Italy would prefer to avoid this.

-- Italy plans to host a meeting in Trieste in early April to follow up on Japan's 2008 G8 initiative for establishment of a network of scientific institutions studying ways to transition to low-carbon societies (refs A and F). This could be an opportunity for informal consultations prior to the G8 Environment Ministerial. Italy supports Japan's initiative, and would welcome U.S. participation in the network. Environment officials asked if the U.S. plans to designate any U.S. scientific institution to participate in the network.

14. (SBU) Environment Ministry experts Federica Fricano and Gloria Visconti sketched out the following vision for the Environment Ministerial:

Day 1 (half day)

Discussion of the availability and deployability of technology to reduce carbon emissions, including financing of this deployment, drawing from data on the cost of different options included in a recent International Energy Agency report, and taking into account the impact of the current financial crisis.

The Ministry is thinking of inviting World Bank and private sector representatives to participate in this session. However, this appears to be in very early stages of planning; Foreign Ministry (MFA) Deputy Director General for Multilateral Economic and Financial Cooperation Claudio Spinedi, who has personal responsibility for international financial institution issues, told the StaffDel that he was not aware of this proposal. He added that World Bank representatives had visited Rome recently to reach out to the GOI regarding the Bank's possible roles in G8 and related meetings which Italy will host in 2009; the GOI did not yet have any concrete proposals in mind, but would remain in contact with the Bank as plans develop.

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Day 2 (full day)

In the morning, discussion of climate change based on a report that the Environment Ministry will draft, which will not/not be a negotiating text. The report would describe trends and emission scenarios, the point of departure of different countries, and the possible options (national targets, the sectoral approach, burden-sharing). The discussion would include topics such as different countries' positions, and solutions to bridge the distance between them, including a possible post-Kyoto framework. Participants would include the G8, plus the five outreach countries and the European Union, plus the three remaining ME countries (South Korea, Indonesia and Australia), and possibly Egypt.

The afternoon will be dedicated to biodiversity topics, as yet undefined. The MFA's Spinedi said that both water and forests are on the list of possible topics for the G8 Summit itself, but that water is higher on the list. He also noted the difficulties of coordinating the G8 and ME meetings with the United Nations climate negotiating schedule.

The Chair's Summary of Days 1 and 2 will not be a negotiating text, the Environment Ministry officials stressed. However, they confirmed that it will be a "consensus document," permitting substantive objections to be reflected. The Day 2 morning discussion would follow from the outcome of the Poznan United Nations climate talks, and would be an opportunity to advance understanding and provide inputs to the climate negotiations process, Fricano said, but she emphasized that the GOI has no intention of pushing for concrete agreement on mid-term greenhouse-gas reduction targets or other commitments. Of course, "If ideas emerge during the discussion" they can be reflected in the Chair's summary, she said.

Day 3 (half day)

Wrap-up session and discussion of the Chair's Summary, followed by a
press conference.

Cooperation with AOSIS on climate adaptation

¶5. (U) The StaffDel was delighted to learn from Dr. Antonio Navarra, Director of Italy's Euro-Mediterranean Climate Change Center (CMCC), that the GOI has an agreement with the Association of Small Island States (AOSIS) to assist them with research and training in seasonal weather forecasting and tropical cyclone prediction, a key aspect of climate change adaptation. The cooperation project is financed by the Foreign Ministry (MFA) and implemented by the Environment Ministry and CMCC, which has an agreement with the Environment Ministry to support it in international cooperation activities. Italy has allocated 8 million euros to the project, which has been going on for at least five years. Dr. Navarra and a colleague from Vanuatu chair the project's joint steering group, which will meet in New York in mid-January (likely January 16).

¶6. (U) Ms. Williams proposed that Subcommittee Chair Rep. Eni Faleomavaega address the January steering group meeting. She noted his abiding interest in increasing U.S. assistance to vulnerable societies and small island states to help them deal with the impact of climate change, and suggested that there might be opportunities in the future for the U.S. to participate in the Italy-AOSIS project. Both Dr. Navarra and the Environment Ministry's Gloria Visconti welcomed U.S. interest in the project, saying they could envision a trilateral arrangement for it, building on the existing U.S.-Italy climate science and technology partnership. (Austria and the City of Milan also are partners in the cooperation agreement with AOSIS.) The MFA's Spinedi noted that adaptation of small island states to climate change is Italy's top priority for assistance in the environment and natural resources area. (The other priorities in this area are forests, combating desertification, and water.) He also stated that Italy is open to other donors' participation in the project, so as to enlarge its impact.

¶7. (U) StaffDel Williams did not have the opportunity to clear this

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cable before departing Post.

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